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MEDIAEVALISM AND MODERNISM IN PROTESTANT
THOUGHT

An account of the course of Protestant theology compressed within reasonable limits has long been a desideratum. The recent work of Professor McGiffert¹ goes a long way toward supplying this want, as far as concerns the pre-Kantian period. The range of the work scarcely corresponds with the title, "Protestant Thought," for it is concerned only with thought on religious subjects, and it may be also that there is a danger that the limitation of attention mainly to the theoretical side of Protestant religious life may lead the unskilled reader to under-rate the worth of Protestant religious progress; but an attempt to keep in view the quality of religious life that sought expression in doctrine would probably have made the work too bulky.

The first half of the book is devoted to the time of the Reformation and, naturally, Luther receives most attention, with Calvin a fair second. A careful discrimination is made between the old and the new in Luther's thought. It is in the former his religious life most appears. "He was pre-eminently a religious character and his great work was accomplished in the religious sphere" (p. 20). But when his views in their entirety are considered "it is clear that Luther was far from being a modern man in his interest and sympathies." "The principle of biblical authority as used by Luther was after all not so completely opposed to the principle of ecclesiastical authority as it might seem." Indeed one result of his insistence on faith as distinguished from works was that among his followers "orthodoxy overshadowed everything else and instead of enjoying greater freedom in religious thought, Protestants were more completely in bondage than their fathers had been" (p. 60). This statement, rather unwelcome to many, seems strictly true, but the sting of it might be alleviated partly by the consideration, if the author had chosen to add it, that the very doctrinal intolerance of Protestants was largely the result of the depth of their interest in truth for truth's sake as against the Catholic regard for the purely ecclesiastical interest.

The analysis of Luther's views is extremely clear and the treatment of them is perhaps not over-severe. It is when the author comes to an interpretation of the inner meaning of Luther's movement that the reader is inclined to insert interrogation marks. Is there not a doubtful antithesis in the statement that Luther, abandoning Paul's view, made salvation "wholly a matter of divine forgiveness rather than of human

¹ *Protestant Thought before Kant*. By Arthur Cushman McGiffert. New York: Scribner, 1911. 261+ix pages. \$0.75.

character"? One wonders also how far the statement "Luther was pre-eminently a religious character and his great work was accomplished in the religious sphere" (p. 20) ought to modify our interpretation of the earlier statement that "the Protestant Reformation was not exclusively nor even chiefly a religious movement" (p. 9).

Calvin receives less sympathetic treatment than Luther. He appears, and correctly, as more of a mediaevalist than the German reformer. To him, "God as sovereign loomed larger than God as Saviour" (p. 98)—a sample of fine succinct statements so frequent in the book. One outcome of Calvin's insistence on authority was that "his higher view of man was obscured and generally lost sight of" (*ibid.*).

The reference to the Anabaptists is on the whole favorable, but rather brief, and the interpretation a little uncertain. When we read that in their view of baptism there was "only the more consistent carrying out of Luther's fundamental principles of salvation by faith alone" (p. 104) and "no one can earn salvation by himself; regeneration by divine grace is always necessary" (p. 104), we wonder why the author says, "Their doctrine was legal to the last degree" (*ibid.*).

In the latter part of the book Protestant scholasticism comes in for the condemnation it deserves. Pietism is appreciated, though the author follows Ritschl's judgment that Spener's interpretation of the Christian life was more Catholic than Protestant.

Rationalism receives a careful, discriminating, and, on the whole, appreciative study. The English movement receives large attention, but the great concurrent movement in Germany is scantily discussed. In this portion of the work the author's fine powers of exposition appear in high degree. His aptness of quotation, summaries of arguments, and general felicity of expression make his account of a movement that has often been regarded as of little worth very interesting reading. The views of nearly all the principal writers are given in their own language. Why no mention should be made of Leland and Lardner is not clear. The author's estimate of Butler is opposed to the prevailing opinion but, in the judgment of the present reviewer, it is correct. Of the first part of the *Analogy* he says, "The general tone of the argument is not at all uplifting" (p. 234). Of the second part he says, "Apologetic as its intention was, it constitutes a step in the evolution of deism into skepticism" (p. 235). "As an apology, either for natural or revealed religion, it is extraordinarily weak, and the line followed in it has been pursued by no important apologist since. This is not because the

work was so effectively done as not to need repeating, but because it was too dangerous in its result" (pp. 238 f.).

Every line of this work is interesting reading, and the book must receive wide attention from the lay reader as well as the professional.

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CHRISTIANITY AND SOCIAL QUESTIONS

Probably no one could be found better equipped, from the standpoint of historical and economic science,¹ to consider present social problems than the learned author of *The Growth of English Industry and Commerce*. Dr. Cunningham's wide range of study shows itself both in the comprehensiveness of his survey, and in his authoritative comments upon many of the proposals for social betterment which he examines. As regards the range of topics treated, there are discussions of physical conditions of life, of racial differences and the problems arising therefrom, of civil authority, of economic life and its connected governmental and ethical problems, and finally, of personal duty. The preacher who is inclined to rush into economic and social programs without thorough study will find the book an admirable protection; for the author is constantly alert to the unfortunate possibilities of identifying Christianity with the particular program which a given situation seems to demand. His historical learning is always ready to point the moral of past experience. The alternative danger, felt by some, that Christianity may take no stand, and hence lose touch with moral progress, does not trouble him. The "spiritual" mission of the church, in his view, is not only primary, but incompatible with active participation in humanitarian work. Christ "sent his apostles on evangelistic work, and bade them administer the sacraments and exercise pastoral care, but he did not enjoin them to agitate for social reforms." There is, indeed, approval for many kinds of social reforms which have been effected, but it is apparently not safe to help on causes which later may prove but temporary goods. But whatever one's judgment as to the general policy advocated—which may seem the policy of McClellan rather than that of Grant—there can be no question as to the usefulness of such a careful survey of the important factors in the social problem.

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¹ *Christianity and Social Questions*. By W. Cunningham. Studies in Theology Series. New York: Scribner, 1911. xv+232 pages. \$0.75.